



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

## Edinburgh Research Explorer

### Trapped in the imperial narrative? Some reflections on imperial warfare and the provincial masses in Byzantium (c. 600-1204)

**Citation for published version:**

Stouraitis, Y 2020, 'Trapped in the imperial narrative? Some reflections on imperial warfare and the provincial masses in Byzantium (c. 600-1204)', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, vol. 44, no. 1, pp. 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2019.21>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1017/byz.2019.21](https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2019.21)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies

**General rights**

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

**Take down policy**

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact [openaccess@ed.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@ed.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



# Trapped in the imperial narrative? Some reflections on warfare and the provincial masses in Byzantium (600-1204)\*

Yannis Stouraitis (University of Edinburgh)

## Abstract

The experience of war by the common people in the medieval East Roman Empire is a topic related to hotly debated issues such as collective identification and attachments, or imperialism and ecumenical ideology. This paper attempts a bottom-up approach to the way warfare was perceived and experienced by provincial populations based on the analysis of selected evidence from the period between the seventh and the twelfth centuries. It goes without saying that the treatment of the topic here could not be exhaustive. My main goal was to problematize the relationship between the objectives of imperial military policies and the pragmatic needs of common provincials for protection of their well-being.

Keywords: Byzantium, imperialism, ecumenism, warfare, identity

Byzantium's image as a society in defence from the late-sixth century onwards, both from a political and an ideological viewpoint, is persistent among Byzantinists.<sup>1</sup> This image is mainly due to the fact that imperial authority underwent two phases of large-scale territorial contraction, first at the end of late antiquity and then again during the late-eleventh and late-twelfth centuries; the latter leading to the empire's disintegration. These developments have led modern scholarship to view the reconquest of the late-tenth century as a kind of interlude, an exception to the rule, and are closely related to the scholarly debate as to whether the medieval Byzantine state should be seen as an empire at all.<sup>2</sup> Within this framework, the role of Roman imperial ideology on Byzantine military policies has been addressed with scepticism. The recurrent discourse of Roman imperialism, i.e. ecumenism, in Byzantine

---

\* The research for this paper was conducted within the framework of the project '[Ideologies under scrutiny: Differentiated perceptions of Roman imperial ideals in Byzantine society \(7th-12th centuries\)](#)', funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) (P 24752-G19).

<sup>1</sup> For that view both in traditional as well as recent scholarship, see H. G. Beck, *Senat und Volk von Konstantinopel. Probleme der byzantinischen Verfassungsgeschichte* (Munich 1966) 29; L. Brehier, *Le monde byzantin II. Les institutions de l' empire byzantin* (Paris 1949) 281; E. Chrysos, 'Ο πόλεμος έσχάτη λύση', in *Βυζάντιο – Κράτος και Κοινωνία. Μνήμη Νίκου Οικονομίδη* (Athens 2003) 543-563; W. Treadgold, 'Byzantium, the Reluctant Warrior', in N. Christie and M. Yazigi (eds.), *Noble Ideals and Bloody Realities. Warfare in the Middle Ages*, Leiden-Boston 2006, 213-223.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J.F. Haldon, 'The Byzantine Empire', in I. Morris and W. Scheidel (eds.), *The Dynamics of Ancient Empires. State Power from Assyria to Byzantium* (Oxford 2009) 205ff.

political jargon is usually regarded as the product of a fossilized, rigid ideological worldview of the imperial court, which was propagandistically employed as a rhetorical construct in order to justify small-scale expansionary warfare through the notion of reconquest.<sup>3</sup>

In light of the above, certain issues need to be raised. The first issue is whether the question of empire and imperialism in medieval Byzantium should be approached in a quantitative or a qualitative manner. From a quantitative perspective, for instance, the size and the expansionist policies of the medieval empire of Constantinople can hardly stand comparison with those of ancient Rome in the period of the late Republic or the early Principate. If we adopted a qualitative perspective, however, the image of a society in defence seems to be contradicted by the evidence showing the gradual expansion of the imperial city-state's realm from the eighth up to the mid-eleventh century. A look at the territories under imperial authority in the early-eighth century (map 1) and those in the tenth and eleventh centuries (maps 2 & 3) demonstrates that the rulers of Constantinople quasi doubled their realm and increased impressively the number of their subjects.<sup>4</sup> By comparison then, the post-seventh century Roman power élite of Constantinople appears to be much more imperialistic in terms of pursuing territorial expansion and the subjugation of new populations than the power élite of the late Roman Empire.

The second issue refers to the role of a common 'identity' in warfare. It is easy to question how far the empire's provincial masses identified with the ideals and policies of expansion celebrated through the discourse of reconquest and traditional Roman universalism. Especially, since the material gains from that type of warfare were mainly claimed by the ruling élite while the common provincials carried the heavy burden of taxation for financing the large imperial armies needed for such campaigns.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, even though the traditional views that attributed the empire's survival to a broadly shared identity based on Christian 'orthodoxy' and the Greek lingua franca no longer hold currency,<sup>6</sup> scholars have

---

<sup>3</sup> Note, for instance, Johannes Koder's remark that the Byzantine imperial ideology of ecumenism seems schizophrenic in the post-seventh century international political context; J. Koder, 'Die räumlichen Vorstellungen der Byzantiner von der Ökumene (4. bis 12. Jahrhundert)', *Anzeiger der philosophisch-historischen Klasse der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 137/2 (2002) 30; cf. the comment in A. Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium. The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge Univ. Press 2007) 103: 'the ideal of ecumenical restoration was confined to the realm of diplomacy, especially, or exclusively, regarding Italy and the union of Churches. In practice, it functioned as rhetorical jubilation for the small-scale reconquest of lands in the Balkans and Asia Minor'.

<sup>4</sup> W. Treadgold, *A history of the Byzantine state and society* (Stanford 1997) 570; idem, *A concise history of Byzantium* (Basingstoke 2000) 236; J.F. Haldon, *The Palgrave Atlas of Byzantine history* (New York 2005) 58-63.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World, 565-1204* (London 1999) 145-46.

<sup>6</sup> On traditional scholarship see, indicatively, G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, trans. by J. Hussey (Oxford 1980) 106; H. Ahrweiler, *L'ideologie politique de l'Empire byzantine* (Paris 1975) 29-36. The best modern account debunking the traditional approach is J. Haldon, *The Empire that would not die. The paradox of Eastern Roman survival, 640-740* (Cambridge 2016), especially chapters 2, 5, & 7.

been less prone to equally challenge the identification of the provincial masses with ideals of defence and protection of a superior Roman order, the *Rhōmaïōn politeia*, or of a chosen Christian people, which are dominant in Constantinopolitan writings.

To begin with, the persistent modern image of post-seventh century Byzantium as an ideologically coherent society defending *en bloc* its common values seems to be related to an underlying tendency in modern scholarship to project upon the defensive activity of the medieval East Roman imperial state traits of modern national societies and nation-states. If this interpretation bears a considerable degree of anachronism, it is yet not fully unjustifiable if we consider that religion and nationalism demonstrate significant analogies as discourses of collective identity, especially when configuring the image of the group vis-à-vis an enemy as the negated external other.<sup>7</sup> Byzantine sources abundantly testify to the practice of the eastern Roman elite to highlight the Christian religion as the society's principal cultural value and a distinctive marker of Romanness not only in defensive wars against enemies of different faith, such as the Muslims, but even when the enemy was Christian and non-heretic.<sup>8</sup>

However, the different social role and function of similar ideological tropes in structurally different socio-political orders is made evident when it comes to the attitude of the eastern Roman power élite towards expansionist warfare. For instance, for the emerging nation-states in the modern era the liberation of populations as (alleged) bearers of the same ethno-national identity was the main means to legitimize war for occupying the territory in which those populations resided.<sup>9</sup> Conversely, the main justifying argument for the expansion of the Constantinopolitan city-state's realm in the period examined here was the prerogative of the reigning city of New Rome and its emperor to claim back cities and regions that had once been under the authority of the Roman imperial power. The identity of the populations in the areas of reconquest, either old or new, was an issue of secondary importance.<sup>10</sup> This attitude was due to the Byzantine power élite's Roman political ideology which promoted identification with a vision of political community whose boundaries were coterminous with the – at any time – current political borders of imperial authority. That enabled a generic

---

<sup>7</sup> Ch. Lorenz, 'Representations of Identity: Ethnicity, Race, Class, Gender and Religion. An Introduction to Conceptual History', in St. Berger and Ch. Lorenz (eds.), *The Contested Nation Ethnicity, Class, Religion and Gender in National Histories* (Basingstoke 2008) 26-27. On the interrelation of religion and nationalism in general, see A.D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples* (Oxford 2003) esp. 4-5, 24-43; R. Brubaker, 'Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches', *Nations and Nationalism* 18/1 (2012) 2-20.

<sup>8</sup> Y. Stouraitis, 'Just War' and 'Holy War' in the Middle Ages: Rethinking Theory through the Byzantine Case-Study', *JÖB* 62 (2012) 235-50.

<sup>9</sup> On the difference between diaspora-annexing military policies by nation-states, which include the liberation/integration into the nation-state of missing parts of the cultural community and/or the national fatherland, and the more rare hegemonistic policies of domination over other nations and their territories, see St. van Evera, 'Hypotheses on Nationalism and War', *International Security* 18/4 (1994) 12-13.

<sup>10</sup> Y. Stouraitis, 'State War Ethic and Popular Views on Warfare', in idem (ed.), *A Companion to the Byzantine Culture of War, ca 300-1204* (Brill 2018), esp. 84ff.

categorization as Roman subjects of all populations coming under the authority of the emperor of Constantinople. In this context, the main means to distinguish between first-class and second-class Roman subjects was religious doctrine, not ethnicity or indigeneity.<sup>11</sup>

Taking this into account, the use of analytical terms such as empire and imperialism, when it comes to post-seventh century Byzantium, concerns the way we approach a medieval social order in which an imperial city-state exercised rule over a fluctuating realm with subject populations marked *de facto* by cultural diversity. As mentioned above, when modern scholars discuss Byzantine expansionism under the justifying rubric of reconquest, the focus is usually on the tenth century and the reconquest of the eastern provinces. The gradual re-imposition of imperial authority over a large part of the Balkan Peninsula in the eighth and the ninth centuries is often downplayed. However, it is a fact that Constantinople had lost control over the largest part of the Balkan Peninsula by the mid-seventh century and that imperial campaigns for the reinstatement of state authority there were motivated by the Constantinopolitan power élite's need to regain control over a lost territory, its natural resources, and its new, culturally diverse population. They had little to do, indeed, with a war whose primary goal was the liberation of fellow Christian-Romans, nor were they propagandized as such.

The latter holds true also for the eastern frontier. Given that the Chalcedonian doctrine was the main reason for the maintenance of an ideological bond between a part of the Christians under Muslim rule and the imperial city-state of Constantinople,<sup>12</sup> one would expect the idea of protection or liberation of fellow Christians in the East to be a central argument of justification of Byzantine warfare against the Caliphate. Especially, if one considers the background of late antique ecclesiastical historiography which was keen to highlight the Christian identity of populations under Persian rule as a justifying argument for Roman warfare against Persia in the fourth and early fifth centuries.<sup>13</sup> A look at post-seventh century Constantinopolitan historiography, however, shows that similar justifying arguments are strikingly absent. This indicates that the ideological role of shared religious identity in the

---

<sup>11</sup> See Y. Stouraitis, 'Roman Identity in Byzantium: A critical Approach', *BZ* 107/1 (2014) 185-206; idem, 'Reinventing Roman Ethnicity in High and Late Medieval Byzantium', *Medieval Worlds* 5 (2017) 72-76; idem, 'Byzantine Romanness: From geopolitical to ethnic conceptions', in W. Pohl et al (eds.), *Transformations of Romanness in the Early Middle Ages: Early Medieval Regions and Identities* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), pp. 127-135. For a different approach, see A. Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformation of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge, 2007) 334-368; idem, 'The Social Scope of Roman Identity in Byzantium: An Evidence-Based Approach', *Byzantina Symmeikta* 27 (2017) 173-210.

<sup>12</sup> Haldon, *The Empire that would not die*, 97-100.

<sup>13</sup> See Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, in F. Winkelmann, *Eusebius Werke, Band 1.1: Über das Leben des Kaisers Konstantin* (Berlin 1975) IV 9-13; Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. J.Bidez and G.C. Hansen, *Sozomenus. Kirchengeschichte* (Berlin 1960) II, 15; Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. P. Maraval and P. Périchon, *Socrate de Constantinople, Histoire ecclésiastique (Livres I-VII)* (Paris 2004-2007) VII 18.

configuration of the goals of Byzantine policy of expansion/reconquest needs to be addressed with caution. All the more so, if we consider that the evidence throughout the period from the eighth to the twelfth century demonstrates one thing: For the imperial power of Constantinople, the goal of expanding its control over lost territories and their human and natural resources, when the conditions for such an expansion were favourable,<sup>14</sup> marginalized issues of doctrinal beliefs or, for that matter, the ethno-cultural identities of the populations in the targeted areas.

Within this framework, one needs to consider that the unanimously acknowledged success of the imperial power in defensive war against the Muslims in Asia Minor refers to its ability to maintain centralized control over a contracted territory and its populations. It has been thoroughly studied how this goal led to defensive tactics that turned the largest part of Asia Minor into a war-theatre for many decades during the second half of the seventh and the first half of the eighth century.<sup>15</sup> According to a sober modern statement, the imperial regime of Constantinople was successful in protecting the capital and the interior of Asia Minor from Muslim occupation through the tactics of skirmishing warfare, but this was done at the cost of large human and material losses for the populations of Asia Minor.<sup>16</sup>

This valid observation needs to be juxtaposed with present-day theories of a Byzantine ‘grand strategy’, which have been keen on highlighting the empire’s ingenious policy of survival against immense external pressure.<sup>17</sup> That kind of analysis – even though it can have its own merits – concentrates on the political aspect of war and the grand-narrative of empire while marginalising the issues of lived and perceived experiences of imperial warfare by the provincial populations. The latter can hardly be taken *a priori* to have perceived and appreciated as successful a defensive policy that often caused them a lot of suffering.

Based on this, it makes sense to question how far the provincial populations identified with the ideals and power-political interests of the ruling élite in warfare for the defence of the imperial order. Instead of reifying common identity and regarding it *a priori* as an agent that predetermined common attitudes empire-wide, one should rather seek to discern whether there was a gap regarding lived and perceived experiences of warfare between the empire’s

---

<sup>14</sup> On the pragmatic and moderate goals of Byzantine imperialism in the East, see J. Shepard, ‘Holy land, lost lands, Realpolitik. Imperial Byzantine thinking about Syria and Palestine in the later 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries’, *Al-Qantara: Revista de Estudios Árabes* 33/2 (2012) 505-45.

<sup>15</sup> R.-J. Lilie, *Die byzantinische Reaktion auf die Ausbreitung der Araber – Studien zur Strukturwandlung des byzantinischen Staates im 7. und 8. Jahrhundert* (Munich 1976) 60-196; cf. W. Brandes, *Die Städte Kleinasien im 7. und 8. Jahrhundert* (Berlin 1989) 56-60, 74-76; Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600-1025* (Basingstoke 1996) 175-78.

<sup>16</sup> M. Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, 179.

<sup>17</sup> E. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge, Mass. 2009); for a sober approach to the strategic rationale of Byzantine military policy, see Haldon, *Warfare* 43ff.

power élite with its Roman imperial outlook and the largest part of provincial subjects – a mental gap directly related to the relationship between an imperial city-state and its provincial periphery.

### *Imperial vs. provincial perspectives*

The perception of war by common provincials in Constantinople's realm was closely linked to the mechanisms for the reproduction of a consensus between rulers and ruled in the socio-political context of a pre-modern tributary state.<sup>18</sup> A main means through which the imperial city-state could justify the extraction of surplus from its provincial subjects and circumscribe their loyalty was efficient military protection. This consensus between the imperial power and its provincial subjects was, however, seriously questioned in the seventh and early-eighth centuries when the Muslim offensive reached its climax and the Balkan provinces were penetrated by Slavic groups.

In the Balkans, for instance, a significant part of the indigenous population does not seem to have put up serious resistance against the Slavic infiltration, insofar as the imperial power had been inefficient for quite a time to protect the territory from the raids of Avars and Slavs.<sup>19</sup> With regard to the Muslim expansion in the East, the author of a hagiographical text of the late-ninth century observed that the boundaries of the Roman power had been contracted due to the heresy of the rulers, that is, due to God's punishment.<sup>20</sup> If this is a *topos* stemming from the theocentric mentality of an iconophile monk, it entails, nevertheless, an implicit political criticism of the imperial power's failure to come up to its duty and protect a large part of populations under its authority.

Saints' lives written in a non-Constantinopolitan context are even more important sources for exploring the mentalities of common provincials, insofar as such texts both reproduced and disseminated thoughts and attitudes that shaped the lived and perceived experiences of the populations of Asia Minor at the time of the Muslim offensive.<sup>21</sup> A good example is the collection of miracles of Saint Theodore the Recruit, written in the late-seventh century. The text summarizes in a picturesque fashion the reality of provincial populations in the course of

---

<sup>18</sup> On the pre-modern state, I follow the definition in J.F. Haldon, *The State and the Tributary Mode of Production* (London – New York 1993) 32–34; cf. Ch. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages. Europe and the Mediterranean 400–800* (Oxford – New York 2005) 57.

<sup>19</sup> See H. Ditten, 'Zur Bedeutung der Einwanderung der Slawen', in F. Winkelmann et al (eds), *Byzanz im 7. Jahrhundert. Untersuchungen zur Herausbildung des Feudalismus* (Berlin 1978) 94 and 104f. (for the consequences of the war on the indigenous population).

<sup>20</sup> *De XLII Martyribus Amoriensibus narrations et carmina sacra*, ed. B. Vasilievskij and P. Nikitin, St. Petersburg 1906, pp. 62–3.

<sup>21</sup> On the social role of hagiographical writings, see St. Efthymiades, 'The Byzantine hagiographer and his audience in the ninth and tenth centuries', in C. Hoegel (ed.), *Metaphrasis. Redactions and Audiences in Middle Byzantine Hagiography* (Oslo 1996) 59–80.

the protracted Muslim offensive.<sup>22</sup> The author speaks of systematic raiding that took place yearly.<sup>23</sup> The enemy was able to winter in the city, kill or capture those that had not been able to take refuge in other places and devastate the site.<sup>24</sup>

This reality is reaffirmed by non-Byzantine sources as well. The Chronicle of 1234, for instance, reports on two campaigns of Muawiya against Caesarea and Euchaita in the 640s.<sup>25</sup> In Caesarea he took captives from the surrounding area and laid it waste before capturing the city, slaughtering its inhabitants and plundering it. In Euchaita, the intruders were mistaken for friendly Christian-Arab forces and caught the people by surprise. They were able to enter the city without resistance, make plunder and take the women and the children as slaves, leaving the city lay ravaged and deserted.

There are plenty of other reports from both Byzantine and Arab sources that testify to the weakness of the imperial armies to protect significant numbers of provincials, which were constantly exposed to captivity and deportation or killing, the devastation of their crops and the long-term interruption of agricultural activity, the plundering and burning down of towns, settlements and estates, and the robbing of their livestock.<sup>26</sup> The most important proof of the situation experienced by the provincial populations of Anatolia at the peak of the Arab offensive comes, however, from the study of pollen evidence from certain areas in the 660s and 670s in particular. The absence of anthropogenic indicators points to the abandonment of sites due to the enemy raids, thus verifying the basic picture drawn by the written accounts.<sup>27</sup>

In this regard, the grand-narrative of a coherent social order defending its common values seems to hide more than it reveals when it comes to the common provincial's experience of war and their commitment to the common cause of defending an imperial order that failed to properly protect them. Here, the latest arguments concerning the military reorganization of the empire in the early Middle Ages, the so-called theme system, need also be taken into account.<sup>28</sup> The older mainstream thesis presented the armies of the *themata* as the product of a mid-seventh century imperial reform which contributed essentially to the empire's survival.

---

<sup>22</sup> J. Haldon, *A tale of two saints: The Martyrdoms and Miracles of Saints Theodore 'the Recruit' and 'the General'*. Critical introduction, translation and commentary (Liverpool 2016) 43-55.

<sup>23</sup> *Vita et Miraculi Theodori*, ed. H. Delchaye, *Les légendes grecques des saints militaires* (Paris 1909) 199.

<sup>24</sup> *Op.cit.* 198.

<sup>25</sup> *Chronicle A.D. 1234*, in A. Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool Univ. Press 1993) 165-66.

<sup>26</sup> On the consequences of the Muslim raids for the common people, see H. Ahrweiler, 'L'Asie Mineure et les invasions arabes (VII<sup>e</sup>-IX<sup>e</sup> siècles)', *Revue Historique* 227 (1962) 7-19; Lilie, *Reaktion* 190-95; cf. M. Jankowiak, 'Notitia 1 and the impact of the Arab invasions on Asia Minor', *Millennium* 10 (2013) 454-56; See, also, the general remarks on the consequences of warfare on the everyday life of common people in Haldon, *Warfare*, 240-41.

<sup>27</sup> Haldon, *The Empire that would not die*, 232-37.

<sup>28</sup> For a critical overview of all the older theses on the theme-system, see J.F. Haldon, 'Military Service, Lands and the Status of the Soldiers', *DOP* 47 (1993) 1-11.



According to this approach, the binding of the soldiers with the arable land of the empire through an alleged centrally-directed allotment of so-called military lands in exchange for military service was considered as an essential measure that entrenched the ideological commitment of an army of peasant-militia to the empire's defence. This thesis promoted, implicitly or explicitly, a romanticized image of the *themata* as a quasi-national army dedicated to the defence of the empire as common *patria*.<sup>29</sup>

However, the latest revisionist approaches have definitely debunked the theory of a military reform in the mid-seventh century.<sup>30</sup> From a military viewpoint, the empire's successful defence against the Muslim offensive was rather the result of the well-directed relocation of the eastern armies of full-time recruits, whose loyal service to the emperor continued to be circumscribed by the established Roman practice of regular payment in kind and/or in cash.<sup>31</sup> The dispersal of the armies of the *magistri militum* across the territories of Asia Minor and their concentration on regional defence prevented the permanent occupation of important towns and fortresses by the invading Muslim armies, which would have led to the permanent loss of whole regions.

As a result, the survival of the empire, i.e. of Constantinople's centralized political, military and fiscal authority over certain territories, needs to be approached – equally to the territorial expansion of the imperial authority in the following centuries – primarily as a matter of the emperor's firm control over loyal field armies as well as of elite patriotism towards the imperial centre. The loyalty of the elite of service, in particular of the military elite, to the political culture of the city-state of Constantinople was informed by this elite's vested interests in the imperial system, whereas it was also underpinned by the nature of the Muslim attack.<sup>32</sup> Within this framework, even though from the late-seventh century onwards the bulk of the recruits in the imperial armies came from the masses of Asia Minor and the Balkan provinces through various practices of centrally-directed recruitment (hereditary, forced or voluntary), this army mainly remained an instrument of the power elite of the

---

<sup>29</sup> Ahrweiler, *Idéologie*, 32-36; P. Lemerle, 'Byzance au tournant de son destin', in idem, *Cinq études sur le XIe siècle byzantine* (Paris 1977) 271; I. Karayannopoulos, *To Βυζαντινό Κράτος* (Athens 1983) 68.

<sup>30</sup> C. Zuckerman, 'Learning from the enemy and more: Studies in "Dark Centuries" Byzantium', *Millennium* 2 (2005) 125f.; J.-Cl. Cheynet, 'La mise en place de thèmes d'après les sceaux: Les stratèges', *SBS* 10 (2010) 1-14; J. Haldon, 'A context for two "evil deeds": Nikephoros I and the origins of the themata', in O. Deluis et al (eds), *Le saint, le moine et le paysan. Mélanges d'histoire byzantine offerts à Michel Kaplan* (Paris 2016) 245-66.

<sup>31</sup> L. Brubaker and J.F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680–850: A history* (Cambridge 2011) 744-46.

<sup>32</sup> Y. Stouraitis, 'Military Power in the Christian Roman Empire, c. 300-1204', in idem (ed.), *A Companion to the Byzantine Culture of War, c. 300-1204* (Leiden: Brill 2018) 5-8.

imperial city-state, serving primarily its power-political interests and only secondarily those of the provincial masses.<sup>33</sup>

A good case in point with regard to that is the notorious defensive action of Leo Phokas against the invading army of Saif ad-Daula in Anatolia in 961, in a period when the empire was militarily strong and on the offensive. While the field armies of Asia Minor were conducting an offensive campaign against the Cretan Muslims under Nikephoros Phokas, Leo Phokas crossed to Asia Minor with military forces from the Balkans to fill the gap. There, he used skirmishing methods in order to defend the imperial territory from the invading army of Saif ad-Daula. The latter was able to penetrate deep into Anatolia, plunder and devastate a number of settlements, and to take a considerable number of war prisoners.<sup>34</sup> The Muslim army was successfully attacked and defeated only on its way out of Byzantine territory.

Despite the successful outcome of the operation in power-political terms, one cannot help noticing that local populations and local economies had to suffer significant damages and losses. According to the account of Leo the Deacon, the defeat of the Muslims led to the liberation of all the captives and the booty that had been taken from the Romans. However, this booty was not returned to the local communities that had suffered from the Muslim attack. It was held by the army and the largest part was distributed among the common soldiers as a reward. The liberated captives were given provisions to return to their devastated abodes.<sup>35</sup> The victory of Leo Phokas was celebrated with a triumph in Constantinople where the war prisoners and the booty from his campaign were paraded.<sup>36</sup>

This incident provides a good example of how the attitudes of provincial commoners towards warfare were shaped through their lived experiences and not by the images of imperial victories as propagated in Constantinopolitan triumphs, panegyrics and historiographical accounts. With this in mind, even though defending provincial territory was an overlapping interest of both the imperial power and the provincials, the latter's actions of defence should not be *a priori* attributed to broader ideological-political motives. Participation in the defence of their locality may have *de facto* favoured the perpetuation of Roman imperial rule over the region but this hardly means that their resistance to the invaders

---

<sup>33</sup> The common people's relationship with the imperial armies can hardly be characterized as harmonious as the source evidence demonstrates. For instance, Theophanes Continuatus, ed. I. Bekker, [Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae] (Bonn 1838) 443, refers to injuries caused to poor provincials by officers and soldiers alike; Leo VI Taktika, ed. G.T. Dennis, *The Taktika of Leo VI* [Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae, XLIX] (Washington, D. C. 2010) IX 2 (155) notes that damages could be caused to the crops of peasants in case the imperial armies assembled for longer time in a region before going on an offensive campaign.

<sup>34</sup> *Leonis diaconi Caloënsis historiae libri decem*, ed. K.B. Hase (Bonn, 1828) 19-20.

<sup>35</sup> *Op.cit.* 23.

<sup>36</sup> M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory, Triumphal rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge/Paris 1986) 166.

was motivated by the Constantinopolitan ideal of defence of the Roman political order, i.e. by broadly shared sentiments of loyalty to a community larger than the local/regional.

The late-ninth century Life of Saint Antonios the Younger sheds light on this. The saint, a sub-governor and military commander in the thema Kibyrraioton at the south-western coast of Asia Minor during the 820s,<sup>37</sup> was able to avert a Muslim attack against the city of Attaleia (or Sylaiou). Striking in this case are the arguments exchanged in the negotiation between the head of the Muslim fleet and the Byzantine officer in their effort to justify or delegitimize the attack, respectively. According to the Muslim commander, the attack was justified because it was directed against imperial territory in order to avenge the attacks of the Roman emperor's army in Syria.<sup>38</sup> In this argument, warfare is perceived and presented as an issue between two broader political entities, the empire of Constantinople and the Muslim caliphate. The involvement and the suffering of the local community are regarded as a consequence of its Roman geopolitical identity.

The reported answer of the Byzantine commander (the saint) fully deviates from this power-political pattern. He considered the Muslim attack unjust because the local community bore no responsibility for the actions of the imperial army, i.e. of the political centre. According to him, 'the emperor of the Romans ordered his officers whatever he wanted and this was done, he sent fleets and prepared armies against those resisting his dominion whether his subjects conceded to this or not'.<sup>39</sup> For this reason, God would not tolerate the injustice done to the local population by the Muslims.<sup>40</sup> As R.-J. Lilie has plausibly observed, this answer demonstrates the deviation of provincial mentality from the Constantinopolitan mentality of imperial warfare.<sup>41</sup> In another context, I have argued that this passage is an indication of the identity gap between Constantinople and the provincial masses, which warns against anachronistic approaches to the East Roman community as a national community.<sup>42</sup>

The saint's statement points not only to the lack of identification of provincial populations with the offensive activity of Roman armies on far away fronts. It equally demonstrates that the determined defence of the locality against the Muslim raiders could and did take place without being motivated by the vision of defence of the *Rhomaion politeia*, i.e.

---

<sup>37</sup> R.-J. Lilie et al, *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit Online*, Databasis De Gruyter, 2014 (thereafter PmbZ) Nr. 534.

<sup>38</sup> *Life of St Antony the Younger*, ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Βίος και πολιτεία τοῦ ὁσίου Ἀντωνίου τοῦ Νέου* (St. Petersburg 1907) 199.

<sup>39</sup> *Op.cit.* 199-200: ὁ μὲν βασιλεὺς τῶν Ῥωμαίων τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ ἄρχουσιν ὅτι θέλει κελεύει καὶ γίνεται, καὶ στόλους ἐκπέμπει, καὶ στρατὸν ἐξοπλίζει πρὸς πόλεμον τῶν ἀντιτασσομένων τῇ αὐτοῦ βασιλείᾳ, κἂν θέλωμεν ἡμεῖς, κἂν μὴ θέλωμεν.

<sup>40</sup> *Op.cit.* 200.

<sup>41</sup> R.-J. Lilie, 'The Byzantine-Arab borderland from the seventh to the ninth century', in F. Curta (ed.), *Borders, barriers and ethnogenesis. Frontiers in late antiquity and the middle ages* (Tournhout 2005) 19.

<sup>42</sup> See Stouraitis, 'Roman Identity', 194-95.

of the Roman order. The whole argument of the local commander is not about defending the imperial order or the land of the Romans against foreign invaders. It is about the right of the local population, both the soldiers of the garrison as well as the civilians, to defend their hometown with the help of God whose assistance they were claiming as righteous Christians facing an attack they had not provoked. Beyond identification with local interest, i.e. local patriotism, religious identity was the main semantic means of contradistinction with the enemy at a broader level.

According to the account of the Life, the commander set young women next to men on the walls to give the enemy the impression of a strong garrison.<sup>43</sup> The employment of similar tricks in order to deceive the enemy about the own army's strength as well as the participation of civilians as militia in the defence of city-walls were widespread practices which are testified by military treatises and other sources.<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, what seems to have primarily contributed to the Muslim commander's decision to abandon the attack was neither the indefinable strength of the local garrison nor the determination of the Byzantine commander to defend the city, but rather the offer of material rewards should the Muslims agree to withdraw.<sup>45</sup> Even though no precise information is provided about the kind and the amount of the reward offered in exchange for the enemy's withdrawal, one may justifiably presume that this must have been generous enough to convince the Muslim commander not to take the risk of an assault. Considering that it must have come from local resources, that is, from the local taxpaying population, it becomes evident that the latter had to accept further financial losses in order to maintain its freedom and local peace.

The account of the Saint's Life entails, therefore, a certain criticism of imperial warfare, which stems from a social reality, in which provincial communities were often in need to defend themselves with little support from the field armies of the imperial center while these armies were busy raiding enemy territory. This critical stance is all the more important, if we consider that it is presented as coming from the mouth of an imperial officer who commanded the soldiers of the local garrison. Even though it is difficult to assert the authenticity of the reported words of the saint, it is important that both he and the author of the text – probably a pupil of the former – represent provincial mentality.

Antonios was an immigrant Christian, born and raised in Palestine under Muslim rule. After crossing to the imperial realm, he was able to settle in the province of Attaleia and to

---

<sup>43</sup> *Life of St Antony the younger* 199.

<sup>44</sup> See C.G. Makrypoulas, 'Civilians as Combatants in Byzantium: Ideological versus Practical Considerations', in J. Koder and Y. Stouraitis (eds), *Byzantine War Ideology between Roman Imperial Concept and Christian Religion* (Vienna 2012) 109-20.

<sup>45</sup> *Life of St Antony the younger* 200.

advance socially due to his connection with the governor-general of the *thema* Kibyrraioton. As a provincial official, he visited Constantinople only once and stayed there for a few months.<sup>46</sup> This points to a person not fully assimilated to the Constantinopolitan culture of the ruling élite of service. Even though his Roman identity, as an identity of political allegiance to the emperor in Constantinople, was enhanced through his higher social status and his position in the provincial administration, he was not a fully integrated member of the ruling élite that made up court society.<sup>47</sup>

It follows that the voice of the saint – evidently deviating from the normative Constantinopolitan discourse – may well be taken to echo the voice of common provincials who did not share the same political loyalty as the élite of service and had little understanding for the needs of a centrally planned imperial military policy. The latter aimed primarily to maintain or regain centralized control over territories and populations within a broader geopolitical sphere and was as much defensive as offensive.<sup>48</sup> Instead, the main concern of provincial populations was the preservation of local peace. Their loyalty to Constantinople as the centre of political power was primarily conditioned by the imperial city-state's ability to deliver effective protection or not.

### ***Common good vs. local interest***

The evidence presented so far provides a good point of departure for an analysis of information coming from Constantinopolitan sources, which indicates a lack of consensus between provincial populations and the imperial government regarding political actions of the imperial city-state in the name of the common interest of the Roman order. Theophanes the Confessor counted among the 'evil deeds' of emperor Nikephoros I (802-811) two measures related with imperial military policy: first, the forced transfer of indigenous Christian populations from Asia Minor to Greece in order to re-organize areas with Slavic populations that had newly come under imperial authority again; second, the organization of rural communities across the empire into fiscal units collectively responsible for financing their poor members enrolled for military service.

According to the chronicler's own words, in the year 809/10 the emperor:

---

<sup>46</sup> PmbZ, Nr. 534.

<sup>47</sup> On court aristocracy or aristocracy of service as the most coherent and conscious political group within imperial society due to its relationship with, and dependence upon, the emperor, see P. Magdalino, 'Court Society and Aristocracy', in J. Haldon (ed.), *A Social History of Byzantium* (Oxford 2009) 212-32.

<sup>48</sup> It is not possible to speak of an overall offensive or defensive disposition in Byzantine strategic thinking and military policy, since utterly defensive tactics that permitted the enemy's deep penetration into imperial territory were implemented simultaneously with offensive and expansionary warfare; Y. Stouraitis, *Krieg und Frieden in der politischen und ideologischen Wahrnehmung in Byzanz* (Vienna 2009) 62-66, 157-69.

removed Christians from all the themata and ordered them to proceed to the Sklaviniai (scil. Slavic settlements in the Balkans) after selling their estates. This state of affairs was no less grievous than captivity: many in their folly uttered blasphemies and prayed to be invaded by the enemy, others wept by their ancestral tombs and extolled the happiness of the dead; some even hanged themselves to be delivered from such a sorry pass. Since their possessions were difficult to transport, they were in no position to take them along and so witnessed the loss of properties acquired by parental toil. Everyone was in complete distress, the poor because of the above circumstances and those that will be recounted later on, while the richer sympathized with the poor whom they were unable to help and awaited heavier misfortunes.<sup>49</sup>

This passage has received more attention for the political motives of the emperor's action, namely the restoration of imperial control over parts of the southern Balkan Peninsula and the integration of Slavic populations into the imperial system than for the stance of the transferred populations.<sup>50</sup> The latter points, however, to the extremely unpopular character of the transfer which common provincials seem to have perceived as an attack against their well-being.

If Theophanes' information on the common people's reactions needs to be addressed with caution due to the author's agenda regarding Nikephoros I, there is yet good reason why his picturesque report should not be dismissed as a mere invention owing to his hostility towards the emperor. The fact that whole families were forced to leave their regional homeland, sell their properties, and resettle to regions that were distant and foreign to them indicates that a good deal of truth lies in the core of the report and that the imperial initiative can have been anything else but popular. This is supported by the fact that the forced transfer of 809 had been preceded by an effort of the same emperor in 805 to motivate voluntary resettlement to Greece, which had failed.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, the reactions of the people should be examined from the point of view of consensus or lack thereof between rulers and ruled by the enactment of centrally-directed policies in the name of common interest as viewed from the perspective of the imperial centre. Nikephoros I's action was evidently informed by the Roman *raison*

---

<sup>49</sup> Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor, vol. I, (Hildesheim 1963) 486, 11-22: Χριστιανούς ἀποικίσας ἐκ παντὸς θέματος ἐπὶ τὰς Σκλαυινίας γενέσθαι προσέταξεν, τὰς δὲ τούτων ὑποστάσεις πιπράσκεσθαι. καὶ ἦν αἰχμαλωσίας οὐκ ἔλαττον τὸ πρᾶγμα, πολλῶν ἐξ ἀνοίας βλασφημούντων καὶ ἐχθρῶν ἐφόδους αἰτούντων, ἐτέρων δὲ περὶ τοὺς γονικοὺς τάφους θρηνούντων καὶ τοὺς ἀποθανόντας μακαρίζόντων· εἰσὶ δὲ οἱ καὶ ἀγχόνας ἐχρήσαντο πρὸς ἀπαλλαγὴν τῶν δεινῶν. τὰ τε γὰρ προσόντα δυσκίνητα συνεπιφέρεσθαι ἡδυνάτουσαν καὶ τὴν ἐκ γονικῶν πόνων κτηθεῖσαν ὕπαρξιν ὀλλυμένην ἐώρων· καὶ πᾶσα τοὺς πάντας εἶχεν ἀμηχανία, τῶν μὲν πενήτων ἐν τούτοις καὶ τοῖς ἐξῆς ῥηθησομένοις, τῶν δὲ ὑπερεχόντων συμπασχόντων αὐτοῖς καὶ μὴ δυναμένων βοηθῆσαι ἀπεκδεχομένων τε βαρυτέρας συμφοράς. Engl. trans. in C. Mango and R. Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern history, AD 284 – 813* (Oxford 1997) 667.

<sup>50</sup> H. Ditten, *Ethnische Verschiebungen zwischen der Balkanhalbinsel und Kleinasien vom Ende des 6. bis zur zweiten Hälfte des 9. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin 1993) 350-52; P. Charanis, 'The Transfer of Population as a Policy in the Byzantine Empire', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 3/2 (1961) 144-45.

<sup>51</sup> W. Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival, 780–842* (Stanford 1988) 136-37, 159-60.

*d'état*, that is, the interests of the imperial city-state regarding the restoration of Roman authority over the Balkan provinces.

For similar reasons, the emperor took another measure. According to Theophanes, he “ordered a second vexation, namely that poor people should be enrolled in the army and should be fitted out by the inhabitants of their commune, also paying to the Treasury 18 ½ *nomismata* per man plus his taxes in joint liability”.<sup>52</sup> This is the fiscal measure that, as John Haldon has convincingly argued, actually introduced the thematic armies in the early-ninth century as an army-model based on a new system of local recruitment, which was intended to make the financing of the soldiers of the provincial forces a collective responsibility of local communities.<sup>53</sup> It was, therefore, a measure aiming to strengthen the numbers and improve the efficiency of provincial army units that protected the interests of the Roman realm. However, the reported reactions of the first poor recruits show that this measure was unpopular as well.<sup>54</sup>

From the common people's stance towards such actions of the central government, we may therefore deduce a mental gap between the Constantinopolitan notion of the common interest of the Roman order and the attitude of provincial subjects that prioritized local communal interest. In this context, the imperial government's political project of population transfer for the consolidation of Roman authority in reconquered regions or its fiscal measures for strengthening the empire's military forces were perceived as coercive actions of a distant power centre that were directed against the interest of local communities and their members' well-being. This said, the fact that the forced population transfer under Nikephoros I seems to have mainly concerned Greek-speaking Chalcedonian Christians demonstrates that the Constantinopolitan state hardly reserved a privileged treatment for the – at least in theory – more Romanized group of its subjects in comparison to other ethno-culturally or confessionally diverse groups.<sup>55</sup>

Nikephoros I's action was part of a series of population transfers from the Balkans to various areas of Asia Minor and vice versa between the late-seventh and the tenth century. Large groups of Slavs were transferred and resettled to regions of Asia Minor, while Syrians, Armenians and the ethno-religious group of the Paulicians were compelled to move from areas of eastern Asia Minor to the Balkans, mainly to the region of Thrace (cf. map 4).<sup>56</sup> This

---

<sup>52</sup> Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 486; cf. Mango and Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, 667.

<sup>53</sup> Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 744ff.

<sup>54</sup> Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 490, 4-7; cf. Mango and Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, 672.

<sup>55</sup> For other forced transfers of indigenous populations within the empire, see Ditten, *Ethnische Verschiebungen*, 306-60.

<sup>56</sup> Ditten, *Ethnische Verschiebungen*, 123-305; R.-J. Lilie, 'Zur Stellung von ethnischen und religiösen Minderheiten in Byzanz: Armenier, Muslime und Paulikianer', in W. Pohl et al (eds), *Visions of community in*

practice of compulsory resettlement and mixture of ethno-culturally diverse populations within the imperial realm provides, therefore, further evidence of the imperial disposition of Constantinople's policy. The power élite used various groups to repopulate regions, to increase the numbers of the productive subject population in its core realm and to strengthen its military forces. To achieve these strategic goals, the state paid little attention to issues of cultural or confessional homogeneity within its realm or, for that matter, to the protection or privileged treatment of a certain culturally dominant group of subjects.

The ethno-cultural bonds between the power élite of Constantinople and its Greek-speaking Chalcedonian subjects also played a marginal role in the configuration of the goals of imperial warfare during the developments of the twelfth century. Michael Angold has explained the reluctance of formerly Roman provincials in Seljuk Anatolia to be reintegrated into the imperial authority of Constantinople as a problem of identity, which contributed to the failure of the imperial power to drive out the Turkish invaders.<sup>57</sup> This observation raises an important analytical issue, namely the difference between an approach to collective identity as an objective and reified phenomenon or as a subjective phenomenon, i.e. as identification in terms of social and in particular political action. Historians are usually keen to attest collective ethno-cultural identities in an objective fashion (based on common cultural markers such as language, script, religion etc.). However, the actual agency of such an objective identity of commonly shared markers in socio-political terms is often questioned by its evident weakness to acquire a subjective dimension, i.e. to be translated into mass political loyalty that is able to promote common action in the name of the group.

In the case of twelfth-century Byzantium, a lack of identification between the Constantinopolitan power élite and provincial populations becomes apparent if one takes a closer look at the Komnenian emperors' choice of objectives both in offensive and defensive warfare. The latter reveal the imperial mentality that continued to pervade the political culture of the Constantinopolitan city-state despite the radical territorial contraction of its realm. This mentality marginalized the role of a common ethno-cultural identity between the power élite and populations within and outside the borders of the state in the former's military policy. This is made evident by the Komnenian regime's effort to restore imperial authority in the East, which did not prioritize the reconquest of Anatolia, where indigenous population had been for centuries predominately Greek-speaking and Chalcedonian. The current power-political interests of the imperial city-state in the context of the crusading movement made,

---

*the post-Roman world: The West, Byzantium and the Islamic world, 300–1100* (Farnham 2012) 301-16; Charanis, 'The Transfer of Populations', 140-54.

<sup>57</sup> M. Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025-1204* (London and New York 1997) 189.



instead, expansionary warfare in the areas of Cilicia and North-Syria a priority, even though the majority of the populations there were Armenian and Syriac (Arab-speaking) and did not share the orthodoxy of the Chalcedonian creed.<sup>58</sup>

The distance between the power-political interests of the Constantinopolitan city-state and the interests of provincial populations is further confirmed by the priorities of the former in actions of defence. The events of the Second Crusade demonstrate that the security of common provincials came second in the strategic concerns of the Constantinopolitan city-state and the power élite's *raison d'état*. Emperor Manuel I Komnenos' main objective was to transport the Crusader armies as soon as possible to Asia Minor in order to prevent attacks against the imperial city. Moreover, he concluded agreements with the German and the Frankish Crusader kings, which guaranteed that the Crusaders would return reconquered cities in Asia Minor to Byzantine authority.<sup>59</sup> Even though he agreed to provide supplies to the German army that was the first to cross to Asia Minor, in the case of the Frankish army he made a different deal. According to Odo of Deuil, he conceded to the Franks the right to buy all necessary supplies from local markets along the way at a fixed price. If a town or a castle should refuse to sell goods or if there was no market in the area, the Crusaders were allowed to plunder and take what they needed, their sole obligation being not to occupy the plundered piece of land.<sup>60</sup>

This extraordinary agreement turned the provisioning of a large foreign army from a problem of the centre into a problem of certain provinces in western and southern Asia Minor. Modern historians have argued that the agreement was due to the inability of a medieval state to supply two large foreign armies simultaneously.<sup>61</sup> However, this argument is flawed since it tends to ignore the fact that, by denying to deal with this problem centrally, the emperor transferred all the burden on certain provinces and their population, thus exposing them to the danger of Crusader attacks. This is all the more true if we consider that those areas suffered from regular Turkish raids and that local markets there might not have been in position to cover the needs of a large foreign army.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, by setting a fixed price for the exchange

---

<sup>58</sup> P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143-1180* (Cambridge 1993) 37, 41; Y. Stouraitis, 'Narratives of John II Komnenos' Wars: Comparing Byzantine and Modern Approaches', in A. Bucossi and A. Rodriguez (eds), *John II Komnenos, Emperor of Byzantium: In the shadow of his father and his son* (Farnham 2016) 33-34.

<sup>59</sup> R.-J. Lilie, *Byzantium and the Crusader States, 1096-1204*, tr. by J.C. Morris and J.E. Ridings (Oxford 1993) 148-57.

<sup>60</sup> Odo of Deuil, *De profectione Ludovici VII in orientem*, ed. and trans. by V. G. Berry (New York 1941) 76-78, 82.

<sup>61</sup> F. Chalandon, *Les Comnène: Études sur l'Empire byzantin aux XIe et XIIe siècles, II: Jean II Comnène (1118-43) et Manuel I Comnène (1143-1180)* (Paris 1912) 286ff.

<sup>62</sup> For the damaged economy of Asia Minor at this time as opposed to the economy of the European provinces, see R.-J. Lilie, *Handel und Politik zwischen dem byzantinischen Reich und den italienischen Kommunen*

of goods and making its violation a justifying cause for plunder, the emperor increased the danger of conflict with local populations on route. Not least because no Byzantine forces accompanied the crusading army to control and negotiate the attitudes of both locals and crusaders – the latter being infamous for their undisciplined character.<sup>63</sup>

This practically meant that provincial populations urgently needed to organize local defence and seek refuge to fortified places in order to avoid attacks and plundering in the absence of protection from the imperial centre. According to the account of Odo of Deuil, it was only strong fortifications that prevented the Crusaders from attacking and plundering certain cities.<sup>64</sup> It comes then as no surprise that local communities along the route of the Frankish army were hostile and ready to cooperate even with the Turks against the Crusaders. Odo of Deuil claims that those actions had been orchestrated by emperor Manuel due to his animosity against the Crusade.<sup>65</sup> However, Choniates, whose criticism of Manuel's attitude towards the Crusaders is well known, has nothing to say about a plan of the emperor to join forces with the Turks against the Franks.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, Manuel's action to send an embassy to Louis VII in late 1148 warning him of an imminent Seljuk attack provides further evidence that no such plan existed.<sup>67</sup>

It seems more probable that the Byzantine emperor was indifferent to the fate of the crusading expedition as soon as he was able to secure the safety of the imperial city-state of Constantinople – the soul and embodiment of the empire – and to ensure that the Crusaders would not occupy territory currently under Constantinopolitan authority. In this power-political context, it was not the emperor who orchestrated the Byzantine provincials' hostility towards the crusading army. Nor should the actions of the locals be explained as owing to their harmonious co-existence with, or any kind of preference towards, the Turks.<sup>68</sup> These actions should rather be interpreted as a result of local politics of survival in the *de facto* absence of efficient protection from the imperial centre. Because of his war against Roger II of Sicily in the West, Manuel was not willing to devote any forces either to shadow the

---

*Venedig, Pisa und Genua in der Epoche der Komnenen und der Angeloi (1081 – 1204)* (Amsterdam 1984) 145-77, 169ff.

<sup>63</sup> On the difficulties of Louis VII to maintain discipline and prevent uncontrolled plunder by parts of his forces, see Odo of Deuil, *De profectione*, 66.

<sup>64</sup> *Op.cit.* 106.

<sup>65</sup> *Op.cit.* 96, 108, 112-14.

<sup>66</sup> Niketas Choniates, *Historia*, ed. J. van Dieten, *Nicetae Choniatae historia*, pars prior (Berlin 1975) 67, reports that Manuel urged the Turks to attack the Germans, but the credibility of that report is questionable, see S. Neocleous, 'Byzantine-Muslim conspiracies against the crusades: history and myth', *Journal of Medieval History* 36/3 (2010) 265.

<sup>67</sup> Odo of Deuil, *De profectione*, 106-108; cf. Neocleous, 'Byzantine-Muslim conspiracies' 261f. who provides convincing arguments regarding Manuel's actual policy towards the Crusade in the shadow of Latin propaganda.

<sup>68</sup> This is argued by St. Runciman, *A History of the Crusades, II: The Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Frankish East, 1100-1187* (Cambridge 1952) 276.

crusaders or to check Turkish forces crossing his borderlines.<sup>69</sup> For this reason, the provincials of western and southern Asia Minor needed to side with the Turks occasionally in the face of a threat that appeared to be common for both and therefore able to unite them in action.

The case of the Second Crusade offers, therefore, another insightful example of how the Roman *raison d'état* of the Constantinopolitan city-state could make the protection of large parts of provincial population a low-priority issue. Such practice inevitably challenged the consensus between the rulers in Constantinople and those currently or formerly ruled by them in the empire's territorial core (the Balkans and Anatolia), triggering the latter's lack of commitment to centralized Roman political rule. Various other reported cases of provincial populations in this period resisting cooperation or even fighting against the imperial army make this evident.<sup>70</sup> In contrast with the seventh century though, the emperors of the twelfth century also saw the loyalty of members of the provincial élite incrementally fade away, as the phenomena of provincialism and separatism demonstrate.<sup>71</sup> This was of major importance for the different outcome of the twelfth-century crisis which led to the empire's political disintegration.

### ***Conclusion***

In the current paper, I have tried to show that the study of east Roman provincial populations' actions and attitudes in war between the seventh and the twelfth century needs to avoid oversimplifying approaches to the medieval East Roman order as a culturally and ideologically bounded society in defence. The goals of imperial military policies, dictated by the imperial city-state's *raison d'état*, were not *a priori* in favour of the well-being of provincials and this is an issue closely connected with the structure and function of a pre-modern imperial state. Provincial experiences of war, both lived and perceived, varied greatly according to geographical location and period and were fairly differentiated from those of the Constantinopolitan centre. As a result of this, the ideological commitment of provincial

---

<sup>69</sup> For a justification of Manuel's actions, see Runciman, *Crusades II*, 275-76. Lilie, *Crusader States*, 160 has argued that, despite the war against Roger II, the Byzantine emperor could have sent a small force to accompany the Crusaders, but he was not interested in contributing to the success of the Crusade. On borderline policies against the Turks, cf. Magdalino, *Manuel*, 49-52.

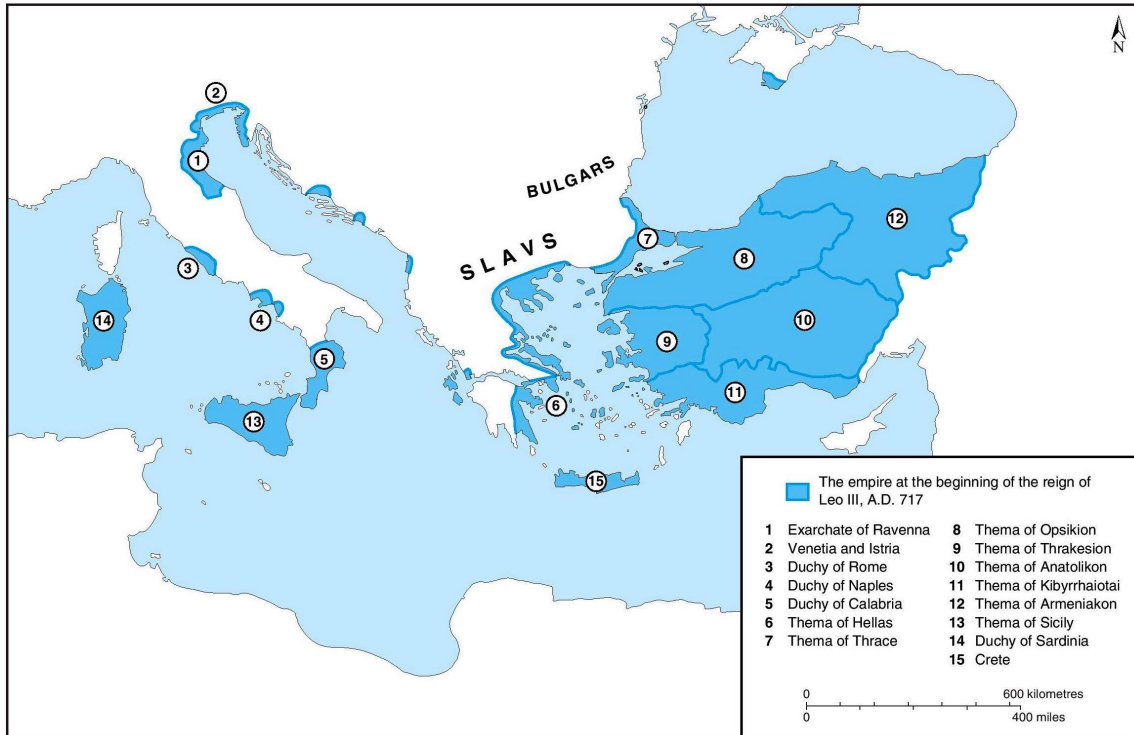
<sup>70</sup> See indicatively the events in Choniates, *Historia*, 37, 495-96; John Kinnamos, *Epitome*, ed. A. Meineke, *Epitome rerum ab Ioanne et Alexio Comnenis gestarum* (Bonn 1836) 22.

<sup>71</sup> On provincialism and separatism in this period, see J. Hoffmann, *Rudimente von Territorialstaaten im Byzantinischen Reich (1071 - 1210)* (Munich 1974) 5-76; R.-J. Lilie, 'Des Kaisers Macht und Ohnmacht. Zum Zerfall der Zentralgewalt in Byzanz vor dem vierten Kreuzzug', in *Poikila Byzantina 4, Varia I: Beiträge von R.-J. Lilie und P. Speck* (Bonn 1984) 9-120; J.-Cl. Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestation à Byzance (963-1210)* (Paris 1990) 379-404, 446-74; Stouraitis, 'Civil War in the Christian Empire', in *idem* (ed.), *A Companion to the Byzantine Culture of War, ca. 300-1204* (Leiden 2018), .

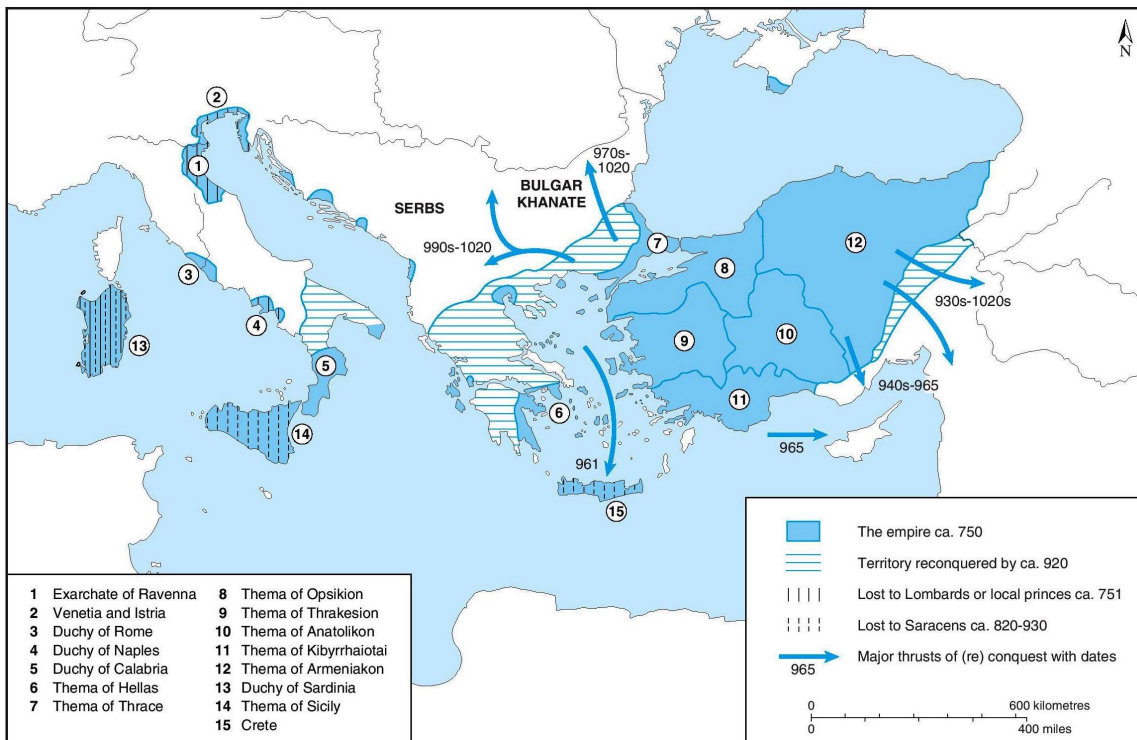
populations to the imperial state was primarily determined by their local interest and not by a broadly shared identification with Constantinopolitan ideals about the perpetuation of a superior Roman order.

## Appendix: Maps\*

Map 1: The East Roman Empire in the early 8<sup>th</sup> century



Map 2: Areas of expansion of imperial authority from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> c.



\* All maps come from J. F. Haldon, *The Palgrave Atlas of Byzantine history* (New York 2005)

Map 3: The East Roman Empire at its territorial height in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century



Map 4: Forced transfers of culturally diverse populations within the empire (7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> c.)

